Digital Epigraphy beyond the Classical: creating (inter?)national standards for recording modern and early modern gravestones

Charlotte Tupman, King’s College London

Digital Classicist seminar, 6\textsuperscript{th} July 2012
He drew near, and whispered hoarsely:
“I’ve got a couple of skulls down in the crypt,” he said; “come and see those. Oh, do come and see the skulls! You are a young man out for a holiday, and you want to enjoy yourself. Come and see the skulls!”

Then I turned and fled, and as I sped I heard him calling to me:
“Oh, come and see the skulls; come back and see the skulls!”

Harris, however, revels in tombs, and graves, and epitaphs, and monumental inscriptions, and the thought of not seeing Mrs. Thomas’s grave made him crazy. He said he had looked forward to seeing Mrs. Thomas’s grave from the first moment that the trip was proposed — said he wouldn’t have joined if it hadn’t been for the idea of seeing Mrs. Thomas’s tomb.

Outline of this paper

1. Description of the material
2. Problems encountered
3. Current projects and approaches
4. Models and standards used in Classical digital epigraphy – applicable to/desirable for the recording and publication of modern inscribed monuments?
5. Pilot project?
6. Practical considerations/incentives for general public to become involved
Nature of the material

- Department of Constitutional Affairs survey received returns on 9,747 burial sites across UK (2006)
- Date range: 16th century to present day
- Most memorials are inscribed stone monuments in churchyards or within churches, or in municipal cemeteries
- They record details about specific individuals, but on a wider scale they are an important part of the archaeology of mortality (Tarlow 1999): they reveal attitudes to death across centuries, responses to political and religious change, individual and group identities, local and regional traditions, techniques of craftsmanship etc.
- Variety of languages
A familiar sight...

(Abney Park cemetery)
Problems encountered

• Natural processes of decay: plant growth over stones, cracking, weathering, tree roots etc.
• 75-85% of cemetery space is already occupied by gravestones; 15-25% of this space is occupied by gravestones more than 100 years old (2006 DCA survey)
• Re-organisation of cemeteries; re-use of space – up to 60% of burials are ‘re-opens’ (Dunk & Rugg 1994)
• Estimated that at least 500,000 gravestones have been moved for health and safety reasons (2008 report by John Mann MP)
• ‘Topple testing’- source of income for private contractors
The good news: management and research

- Ministry of Justice Burial and Cemeteries Advisory Group
- Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management
- Historic Environment Local Management (HELM)
- English Heritage
- Cemetery Research Group (University of York)
- Centre for Death and Society (University of Bath)
- School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology (University of Liverpool)
The continuing challenge: recording and accessing the data in gravestones

- No national gravestone recording project
- Several regional projects run by the University of Liverpool with the University of York:
  http://www.liv.ac.uk/sace/research/projects/graveyards/index.htm
- Some more localised projects to record monumental inscriptions, e.g. those run by local historians, church groups, family historians
- Limited availability
- Sheer size of the material makes fragmentary approach inevitable
- Complexity of material – how much/what information to record?
- Smaller projects often only record the text – no additional data on the monuments, locations etc.
- Larger projects e.g. Liverpool/York surveys are much more comprehensive
Current grave recording projects

• Crowdsourcing projects:
  – Gravestone Photographic Resource (website for submitting photos and transcriptions)
  – BillionGraves (app for submitting photos and transcriptions)

• Projects involving direct or partial training:
  – University of Liverpool/University of York Archaeology of Graveyards surveys
  – Historic Graves (Ireland) surveys
Gravestone Photographic Resource

An international grave monument directory

Key features

1. All images are free and have been taken by volunteers (can you help?)
2. List of all the different surnames stored within the system.
3. List of all the records held for a particular surname.
4. List of all of the family relationships mentioned on a monument.
5. List all cemeteries and graveyards.
6. List of all the photographed cemeteries within a region.
7. List all the details recorded for a specific monument.
8. List cemeteries to be added to GPR.
9. List frequently asked questions (FAQ).
10. List other genealogical sites.
11. List comments / feedback / help requests.
12. Upload your own grave photos.
13. Index yours or other peoples grave photos.

latest comments

family name | title | latest comment / feedback / help requests

GPR statistics

There are now over 1,573 cemeteries, 31,600 different surnames, 217,000 graves and 457,000 people indexed from 23 different countries within GPR.

Since 1st January 2012, on average over 2 new cemeteries have been added to the GPR each week.

latest news

A new uploading and indexing system is now available. This system allows visitors to upload and/or index grave monument photos and will be especially useful for those people who have their own grave images they wish to share.

The GPR now hold over 300,000 images of grave monuments which take up about 600Gb. These images contain over 450,000 names.

quote of the week

A very useful web site. I will be adding some gravestone photos in the future. - SL

latest cemetery

St Margaret cemetery in Wychling, Kent, England

family names

Find all the spellings of a name

To see all the surnames starting with a specific letter, press that letter:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

family name

Find a family name

To see all the entries for a particular family name (surname), please enter the name in the box below and then press the FIND FAMILY button.

This search box is also at the top right of every page.

statistics

GPR statistics

latest news

A new uploading and indexing system is now available. This system allows visitors to upload and/or index grave monument photos and will be especially useful for those people who have their own grave images they wish to share.

The GPR now hold over 300,000 images of grave monuments which take up about 600Gb. These images contain over 450,000 names.
Gravestone Photographic Resource

- http://www.gravestonephotos.com/
- Worldwide project
- Relies on volunteers submitting photographs and transcribing the contents of the inscriptions
- Makes photographs available for free, BUT only by email request, and:

  “The GPR is offered as a free service. In the last year I have sent out thousands of images and less that *(sic)* 50% of recipients have bothered to send either an acknowledgement or thank you. As a result, all requests are now veted *(sic)* on what is entered in the above field.”

- = Unreliability of access to data
Help Make Family History Available to Everyone!

**Collect** photos of the headstones in your local cemetery with our iPhone/Android camera app. Then upload the mapped-out photos here.

**Transcribe** information from uploaded headstone photos - then descendants everywhere can easily search for their ancestors.

**Search** for your ancestors’ graves using our easy search. You can access their headstone records, photos of headstones, and accurate locations of all the graves.

**Headstone Search**
- Given Names
- Family Names
- Birth Year
- Death Year

Check out the Advanced Search Page

**News Feed**
- [569 images added to Concord Cemetery, Garner, Iowa, United States](#) 23 days ago
- [111 images added to Riverside Cemetery, Moline, Illinois, USA](#) 1 day ago

**Register Today**
- Username
- Email Address
- Password
- Confirm Password

Yes, I agree to BillionGraves Terms of Use.

**Register**
BillionGraves

- http://billiongraves.com/
- Worldwide project
- App compatible with iPhone and Android
- Aimed at creating a family history database
- Users download the app, register, then use smartphones to submit GPS-tagged photos, and transcribe the texts
- BillionGraves Plus account provides a service to notify users when information matching their search criteria is added to the database
- Provides advice on taking photos but not on how to read inscriptions and transcribe; further details of the monuments are not requested
HENRY LEE TUPMAN

Record | Description | History | Nearby Records | Other Individuals (0) | Social Sharing
---|---|---|---|---|---
Birth | 25 December 1888 | | | | 
Death | 6 July 1972 | | | | 
Burial Place | Independence Cemetery, Independence, Kentucky, United States | | | | 
Married | Not Available | | | | 
Contributor | Ddwrightman (May 6, 2012) | | | | 

Find More At...
Archives

Clean This Headstone

Image | Map
---|---

HENRY LEE TUPMAN
KENNETT
HORSESHOER, US ARMY
WORLD WAR I
DEC 23 1888 JUNE 6 1972
Archaeology of graveyards

Mortuary data consists of above-ground evidence, particularly the layout of graveyards and the monuments within them, and also below-ground evidence. The latter is less easily studied, but important collections are becoming available.

Graveyards and graveyard monuments

A large number of graveyard recording projects have been undertaken on memorials from the historic period. Different, more specific research projects will each be provided with their own web page in due course, but a brief overview is given here. Some general issues have underpinned all the studies, and informed wide-ranging questions regarding commemoration, memory and identity. Most memorials have been of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and major projects are under way in:

- Yorkshire
- Wales
- Ireland
- Bedfordshire
- South Down
- Ulster, and thence to North America and Australia

There are specific questions asked in each of the regions, where the evidence is particularly suitable for examining particular issues, and all feed into the general questions outlined here.

- What was the chronology of external memorial?
- In what ways were the aspirations of families manifested in the material form and text of memorials?
- Which aspects of the deceased's identities were emphasized on the memorial?
- What factors affected the spatial development of graveyards?
- To what extent did the attributes of monument form, material, textual content and symbolism vary independently of each other?

Burial evidence
Archaeology of Graveyards

- http://www.liv.ac.uk/sace/research/projects/graveyards/index.htm
- Builds on Harold Mytum’s work on recording and analysing graveyards
- Surveys already undertaken in Yorkshire, Bedfordshire, Wales, Ireland, and other places
- Specific research questions investigated in each geographical area studied
- Surveys carried out by university staff and students with some volunteers
- Excel spreadsheets currently used for recording - can be imported into SPSS for analysis
- Published reports
Historic Graves

- http://www.historicgraves.ie
- c. 10,000 monuments published so far
- Highly collaborative project
- Aims to combine pre-existing state records with crowdsourced data
- Links to audio and video records relating to specific graves
- Provides workshops and training sessions for volunteers
- SQL database used with Drupal CMS
CO-ABL-009

By | Monday, April 11, 2011

Location
51° 42' 25.776" N, 8° 31' 42.0312" W

Graveyard: Abbeylands

In Loving Memory

OUR DEAR DENIS
DIED 26 - 8 - 1943
MARY (nee LEHANE)
DIED 25 - 10 - 2005
HER HEART"
The Historic Graves Project has been funded and supported to date by Leader companies, Local Authorities, Dept of Environment Fund via Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Heritage Council. The breadth of the list below demonstrates the collaborative nature of the whole project. The majority funding bodies so far are the Leader organisations included in the listing of partners below:

- Ballyhoura Development Ltd
- Cavan County Council
- Cavan Monaghan LEADER
- Cork City Council
- Cork County Council
- Dublin City Council
- Fingal County Council
- Fingal LEADER Partnership
- Kilkenny Borough Council
- Kilkenny LEADER Partnership
- Kilkenny County Council
- Laois County Council
- Laois Partnership
- Meath Partnership
- Monaghan County Council
- North Tipperary LEADER Partnership
- South & East Cork Area Development Ltd
- Waterford County Council
- Waterford Leader Partnership
- Waterford County Museum
- West Cork Development Partnership

The local community groups with whom we have worked so far, and for whom we provided training, engaged wholeheartedly in the collaborative approach which is a key part of the overall project. A selection of these groups is listed below:

- Clontibret Community Group
- Tynadale Community
- Errigal Triugh Community Group
- Aghada Graveyard Recorders
- Imokilly Community Group
- Ballineen Enniskeane Heritage Group
- Kinsale History Society
- Mitchelstown Heritage Society
- Banscal na Toirbhite, Mitchelstown
- Aghaboe Preservation Society
- St Fergal’s College, Rathdowney
- Clonaslee Vocational School
Requirements for a UK-wide grave monument resource

• Two key aspects: **recording** and **access**

• Recording:
  – Challenge of designing interface to make the entry of data straightforward to do without sacrificing detail
  – Laptop, tablet, smartphone all likely to be used to enter data

• Access:
  – Resource must be sustainable and maintained (funding/manpower issue)
  – Free for the user
  – Incorporation with other types of material? Ensure data is useful for other projects
But **what** are we recording?

- A way to ensure consistency and scholarly usefulness is for interested parties (universities, local history groups, councils etc.) to work together to **develop UK-wide standards** for recording and publishing grave monuments.

- Treating all gravestones as **archaeological and epigraphic evidence**, and applying appropriate academic rigour to their recording and study.
Digital Classical epigraphy = model for digital modern epigraphy?

• Choice of database, XML tags, etc. is not the key issue under discussion here, though that will be important to consider when designing the project.

• The question is whether we can develop useful scholarly standards that can provide a basis for data entry by a large number of volunteers (the vast majority of whom are not trained epigraphers, archaeologists or historians).

• Digital Classics has a potential model for such standards...
Table of Contents: EpiDoc: Guidelines for Structured Markup of Epigraphic Texts in TEI

- Introduction and Organization
  - Introduction for Epigraphers
  - Background and Rationale
  - Conformance and Interoperability: What it means to be EpiDoc
  - Organization of the Guidelines: where to go from here
  - The encoding of the guidelines, a technical description

- Transcribing and Editing the Text
  - Lines, sections and references to them
    - Lines
    - Units of the text (fragments, columns, sections)
  - Transcription of characters and sigla on the stone
    - Transcription with no problems
    - Transcription with no uncertainty about the form of the character(s), but the editor prefers not to resolve them.
    - Transcription wherein the character would not be unambiguous outside its context
    - Transcription wherein vestiges of characters remain, but they cannot be recognized (extent certain or nearly so)
    - Transcription where letters are completely lost
      - Letters completely lost (extent certain or not certain)
      - Letters completely lost (extent less certain due to variation in the size of surviving characters)
      - An entire line completely lost (extent certain or uncertain)
      - Possibility that letters have been completely lost
    - Letters read by a previous modern observer, but which cannot now be read
    - Transcription where a vacat is evident or suspected
  - Addition and deletion in antiquity
    - Addition of text in antiquity
    - Deletion of text in antiquity
    - Deletion and overstruck addition of text in antiquity
  - Characters and sigla: form and appearance
    - Vowels carrying apices
    - Letters and numerals highlighted by supralinear lines
    - Letters and numerals highlighted by intralinear lines
    - Letters joined (ligature)
    - Reversed letters
    - Special Characters
      - Acrophonic numerals
      - Chi-Rho (Ϙ)
      - Claudian letters
      - Interpuncts
    - "I Longa"
    - Tall characters
    - Small characters
Guidelines for publishing modern epigraphic materials

• Could we produce EpiDoc-style Guidelines for publishing modern gravestones? Would this be useful/desirable?
• Who would need/want to be involved in designing such guidelines?
• How would this type of model need to be adapted to take into account a volunteer taskforce/wide-ranging audience? -> cf. Oxford Ancient Lives project, Papyrological Editor
• Would guidelines simply act as an ‘unseen’ basis for designing the data entry fields, or would volunteers engage more actively with guidelines?
Papyri.info is dedicated to the study of ancient papyrological documents. It offers links to papyrological resources, a customized search engine (called the Papyrological Navigator) capable of retrieving information from multiple related collections, and an editing application, the Papyrological Editor, which contributors can use to suggest emendations to PN texts.

The Papyrological Navigator aggregates and displays information from the Advanced Papyrological Information System (APIS), the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri (DDbDP), the Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyruskunden Ägyptens (HGV), and Bibliographie Papyrologique (BP), as well as links to Trismegistos.
Potential pilot project

• Collaboration with existing projects highly desirable/essential
• Contacts already made with directors of Historic Graves and University of Liverpool graveyard surveys
• What would pilot involve?
  – First attempt at drawing up guidelines with other relevant parties
  – Evaluating technologies for entering and storing data
  – Designing interfaces for mobile devices
  – Deciding upon methods for publication/sharing of data
  – Recruitment and training of volunteers
  – Limited geographical scope to begin with
Awkward question no. 1...

Does anyone outside the scholarly field actually care about any of this?
Awkward question no. 2…

How can we **MAKE** people care about it?

(perhaps not quite as much as this guy...)
Incentives for the general public to become involved

- Without the interest and practical support of significant numbers of people, important historical evidence will continue to be lost
- Academic duty as epigraphers, archaeologists and historians to attempt to record and publish this data thoroughly and consistently (and to convince funding bodies of the importance of this!)
- Most obvious way to convince the general public to become involved is via the huge upsurge in family history research
- Public needs to be given direct, free access to the genealogical data from these monuments – more likely to contribute if there is clear benefit for them
Linkup with site like ancestry.co.uk?

• Collaboration with a site such as ancestry.co.uk has potential for several reasons:
  – Over a million users every month
  – Data can be tied in with other sources already available on the site, e.g. census returns, general register office records, tax records etc.
  – Good forum for making people aware of project
  – Ideal place to recruit volunteers

• Two main groups of people interested in this material: small group of scholars, and much larger number of people researching their family history

• Combining the skills and energies of these two (sometimes overlapping) groups would be of clear benefit to both
Acknowledgements

• I would like to thank John Tierney, Jon Scholnick and Harold Mytum for offering their encouragement and for providing me with valuable insight into their own projects.
• All photographs by author or used under the terms of the Creative Commons License from the following sources:
  – http://www.flickr.com/photos/howzey/2128320755
  – http://www.flickr.com/photos/cmdrgravy/231974498
• charlotte.tupman@kcl.ac.uk